

Indigenous Knowledge Dissemination and Use: A Discuss

By

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Abstract

The paper discusses the dissemination and use of indigenous knowledge. It highlighted the type and sources of indigenous knowledge in Nigeria. Means and tools for creating and exchanging indigenous knowledge, the likely situations under which indigenous knowledge could be used and how indigenous knowledge can be disseminated were discussed. The paper concluded by making recommendations on how to promote the creation, usage and transfer of indigenous knowledge in Nigeria.

Introduction

During the past twenty years, there has been a dramatic expression in the availability and dissemination of information through electronic means. Despite this, the vast majority of people in the developing world lack access to critical information. The gap between those who are “connected” and those who are not, called “the Digital Divide” has been widening both between developed and developing countries, as well as between the rich and the poor within countries. This information supply gap means that the poor and the marginalized are not able to access information and services that would have helped them improve their lives.

A narrow definition of the “digital divided” focuses on access to computers and the Internet. Access alone does not bridge the technology gap in order to realize the potential of today’s information tools, people need the skills to operate them to better their lives and the health of their communities. The ability to create and share relevant community information is part of that equation: information sharing – creation – access. Communities need to recognize the value of, and make use of, their own local learning systems and local knowledge for a sustainable development (Yeomans, 2003).

A study by Taglang (2000) found out that it is as important to create useful content on the Internet; material and applications that serve the needs and interests of million of low-income and underserved Internet-users, just as it is important to provide computers and Internet connections.

According to Lazarus as cited by Taglang (2000):

There has been so much focus on the boxes and wires to connect to the Internet that we almost forget to ask what people are getting once they connect...We found a strong desire among people for practical, local information about their neighbourhoods that seems to fly in the face of the way the Internet is moving in terms of national portals.

This view was corroborated by Boyd (2005) when he wrote that: “the Internet has spread its tentacles throughout the world, reaching communities all over the globe. But it is quite another thing to help local people figure out what to do with the technology once they get it”. Much earlier with this, Armstrong (2002) queried that “If a person comes up to the terminal and there is nothing in their language that is relevant to their lives, then why should they bother?”

While ICT can disarm social stereotypes and prejudices and empower members of disadvantaged language communities and other minority groups, it can also play an important role in assisting underserved communities to access critical information.

An effective delivery of this information depends on utilizing an approach that is suited both to the constraints and the strengths of the recipient communities. Hence, the need to determine what content is desired by people who have low income, live in rural communities, have limited education opportunities, or are members of racial or ethnic minorities leading to what is call “indigenous knowledge”.

The Concept of Indigenous Knowledge

Defining indigenous knowledge is a major challenge. This is because one person’s “indigenous knowledge” could be another’s ‘global knowledge’ depending on the perspective adopted. However, indigenous knowledge has been seen to be the expression of the locally- owned and adapted knowledge of a community – where the community is defined by its location, culture, language, or area of interest (Global Knowledge Partnership, 2005). On the other hand Ballantyne (2002:2) defined indigenous knowledge as “using ICTs to create, adapt and exchange local information, the content of a community”. According to him, it includes global content that has been transformed, adapted and assimilated into the community’s knowledge base. To him, indigenous knowledge can be exchanged and shared, locally or globally, in various formats, packages and media.

According to Pakenham (2001:9), indigenous

knowledge is not only the original research and expression of local knowledge, it also refers to the complex process of access, interpretation, synthesis and repackaging of local and global knowledge. It could be said that from the foregoing definition indigenous knowledge can be the expression, access and exchange of local knowledge in both local and foreign languages whereby the accessibility of the information for both the community and the people outside the community are increased, and in the process enhance respect for the local culture and identity.

Types of Sources of Indigenous Knowledge

Communities in many countries have their own storehouse of indigenous or traditional knowledge that has been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. They express these knowledge in many forms; through poetry, story telling, song writing, drama, in conversations and meetings, as words on paper, as voices on the radio, through art and culture and in photographs and films.

In many African communities, indigenous knowledge is available in form of words, sounds, images and objects that were generated by community members of all ages through conversations, performances and different creative activities. These communities create content in the form of talking, arguing, working, singing, rehearsing, moving, painting, drawing and complaining. Story telling by elders, sharing myths, songs, dances, riddles, poems, dramas, listening to taped materials, superstitious beliefs, religion, practical demonstrations, rumours, photographs, watching videos, reading written reports (in the local languages), materials displayed at Seed / Fruit Fairs. Indigenous Knowledge Competitions were forms of communications employed in the process of transferring and conserving knowledge. From local community meetings and functions like agricultural shows, church ceremonies, market day gatherings, festivals and other relevant events in the community, the local people can gather and pass information especially on indigenous knowledge. Other cultural events include harvest festivals and seed planting ceremonies. These types of traditional events are still common in some parts of Africa. However, many are already lost due to westernization and religious revolution during the colonial era in the Continent. Also, the research output of African scholars, which serve as our literary heritage is also another major source of indigenous knowledge.

Given the neglect and rapid pace of social and cultural change, it is not surprising that this invaluable knowledge is fast disappearing. Much of the traditional knowledge are at risk concerns

perhaps due to the biodiversity that local people depend on for present and future survival (Quek & Eyzaguirre, 2002).

Nonetheless, Anafulu (2005) and Nwogu & Akinde (2006) highlighted some sources of indigenous knowledge of communities in Nigeria. Their studies have been adapted and expanded to include:

Oral Literary Forms

- Legends, Folklores and their lyrics
- Praise songs
- Recitations e. g. Ewi in Yoruba culture
- Moonlight tales – (By communities in Yoruba and Igbo Lands)
- Proverbs and alliterations

Entertainment:

- Local Theatre, Dramas and Dances
- Festivals, local (talking) drums and drumming.
- Rite of passage – marriage, funeral, and birth rites.
- Local wrestling, and
- Games e.g. the Ayo game in Yoruba Land.

Visual Arts and Crafts

- Paintings
- Weaving and Textile making (e.g. The Akwete Cloth Weaving in Ukwu, Abia State, Nigeria and Aso-Oke in Yorubaland
- Dying – (Adire in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria)
- Pottery – The Ladi Kwale fame in Niger State, Nigeria; Lokpanta in Abia State, Nigeria, etc.
- Smithing and Brass making – Adamawa & Bornu States, in the North-East of Nigeria.
- Leather works – Sokoto State, Nigeria

Local Food and Drinks

- Recipes of local dishes unique or special to a particular community.
- Formulations of locally brewed drink (e.g. Kunu and Zobo in some parts of Northern Nigeria).

Other sources of indigenous knowledge have been found to include:

- Local Attires and Hairdos
- Local Trade and Commerce
- Community Development Activities
- Contents of Archives, Museum, Cultural and Oral History Collections
- Scholarly Dissertations, theses, reports, research works on locally relevant topics written by indigenous authors.
- Patents of Local Inventions.

Indigenous Knowledge Dissemination

Indigenous knowledge does not flow on its own accord. It needs owners or originators with the vision motivation to create, adapt or exchange it. They need to have the creative, technical and people skills to transform an idea, an artifact, knowledge, belief, value, norm, art, moral, law, custom, language, human institutions, technology

and tradition into something that can be disseminated or exchanged.

It has been observed that there is lack of Internet-content generated by ethnic communities themselves or organized around their unique cultural interests and practices. Hence, the need to share and celebrate the uniqueness of cultures in Africa via a powerful tool like the Internet. Very little information is suitable for dissemination to local communities and available on the Internet. Also very little information proceeds from these communities to the outside world. Hence, the need to digitize Africa's indigenous knowledge for an increased access. Also it needs to be repackaged to ensure local suitability and relevance.

With the emerging ICT tools and indigenous ICT expertise, much of the invaluable traditional knowledge can be saved, documented, improved upon, digitized (to preserve, for posterity, etc.) and transmitted for the use of communities within and outside a particular country. In order words, for ICT to be an empowerment tool and a conveyor of the locally relevant messages and information, it has to provide opportunities for local people to interact and communicate with each other and with the outside world, expressing their ideas, knowledge and culture in their own languages. This enables the people take decisions that affect their lives, grasp economic and social opportunities, and deal with misfortunes and disasters, etc.

The toolkits to be used to transfer indigenous knowledge include:

1. Tape Recorders
2. Radio
3. Television
4. Newspapers
5. Telephones
6. Computers
7. Cameras (e.g. Video cameras, Camcorders, etc.)
8. ICTs via Internet, e-mails, listservs and other facilities
9. Fax
10. CD-ROM
11. Printed materials/documents (e.g. brochures, posters, etc.)
12. Diskettes
13. Social gathering in communities.

These tools can be used either singly or combined for a good effect.

Indigenous Knowledge and Utilization

Indigenous knowledge are no doubt useful in many respect. They can be used in the following areas of needs viz;

- i. Interaction on African art, music, video, pictures, tips and strategies, user profiles,

food and sport, etc. which will allow people to share information about their heritage and cultural practices.

- ii. Health information to be presented with the interests of particular racial and ethnic group in mind and with local connections.
- iii. Information on African youth-friendly tutorials and training.
- iv. Employment and educational opportunities e.g. in the provision of information on local service organizations like job agencies, day-care, after-school programmes and homework assistance.
- v. Online translation tools since so much of Web content is currently in English. Also an interactive Web-Site can be created to provide grammar practice, vocabulary development and reading assistance.
- vi. Business development e.g. in the provision of information on agriculture and product / market prices, stocks, shares, etc.
- vii. Entertainment e.g. in the provision of information on neighborhood events and yearly destinations for family outings.
- viii. Religion e.g. in listings of places of worship
- ix. Estate and accommodation e.g. in listings of local housing opportunities for investment purposes and for people looking for accommodation.
- x. Provision of information on community government like taxes, census and voting, laws and rules, etc. which should be available in native languages.
- xi. Cultural exploration and development and oral history, reflecting unique cultural characteristics, attributes and beliefs.

Concluding Remarks

It is not enough for a people to be 'proud' of their culture. The more important issue is what contributions the aspects of a people's culture make to human civilization. There is an urgent need for a more realistic, thoughtful and honest involvement in cultural advancement for the development of indigenous knowledge application. Social and economic development is not possible without the meaningful and sustained involvement of the people who are mostly affected by developmental changes. The challenge therefore is to fire-up people's imaginations and tap into their potential to make real difference by engaged them as central players in issues concerning their development. Access to information and knowledge are vital resources required to alleviate poverty and build a foundation for a long term changes in ways that make people active participants in their own empowerment.

National policies should be made to address issues on standardization and rise in the status of local languages by supporting their use in education programmes, on the Internet and in research. Investments should be made in digitization and digital libraries. This can be achieved through co-operative digital project at national and / or regional levels. International assistance should be sought from established digitization centers in developed countries.

Beyond the digitization projects funded by donor agencies, the onus is on African Librarians, Archivists and other information professionals to identify, promote and digitize items or materials that are of cultural, historic, research, scientific and indeed commercial value. This would go a long way in utilizing the indigenous knowledge for the empowerment of Africa in the global economy.

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